



**DENCA Advisory Council Minutes
September 7, 2011
Delta Performing Arts Center, Delta, CO**

Those attending:

- Chair Katie Steele of Grand Junction
- Neil "Mike" Wilson of Eckert
- Steve Acquafresca of Grand Junction
- Vice-chair Bill Harris of Montrose
- Tamara Minnick of Grand Junction
- Terry Kimber of Delta

Absent:

- Joe Neuhoof of Grand Junction
- Oscar Massey of Whitewater

BLM staff attending: Katie Stevens, Andy Windsor, Ben Blom and Brodie Farquhar.

Public attending: Doug Atchley of Delta County, Sherry Schenk, Eric Rechel, Joyce Olson, Kay Simonson, Terry and Janet Gray

Chairwoman Katie Steele called the meeting to order at 3 p.m. and noted there was a quorum.

Public comment

Eric Rechel (Sierra Club): Emphasized that all recreationists should strive to reduce the impact of their activities on public lands. Also asked that the north side of Cactus Park not have roads improved for the passage of passenger cars, so as to reduce the number of visitors and thus impact to the area. He noted that if all uses are equal in the Omnibus Act, then recreation cannot be made the priority use. He suggested that Extensive Recreation Management Areas (ERMAs) might have less negative impact on the Dominguez-Escalante National Conservation Area than Special Resource Management Areas (SRMAs).

Based on questions from members of the public, the Advisory Council chair asked the BLM to discuss the SRMA/ERMA designation again. Recreation Planner **Windsor** explained that SRMA-style management means a focus on specific recreation experiences and outcomes. Other resources and uses are equal to

recreation in an ERMA, but not with SRMA-style management. SRMA-style management doesn't necessarily mean greater impact on other resources. SRMA-style management can mean less or more people and activity, depending on what BLM is managing for. **Windsor** noted that SRMA-style management is a commitment to a high quality of recreation experience, whereas an ERMA is simply an opportunity to recreate. **Kimber** asked whether a National **Conservation** Area can even emphasize recreation? **Acquafresca** noted that NCAs have a higher designation level than with SRMA-style management – that it takes Congress to create a NCA, while a SRMA can be created administratively. **Stevens** said that for her, SRMA-style management make more sense outside a NCA, because they help prioritize recreation over other uses. She does see value of SRMA-like management tools like those used on Ruby/Horsethief – even in a NCA. She emphasized that having SRMA-style management does not mean forgoing the protection of other resources.

Windsor said SRMA-style management would entail tradeoffs in the planning process. A trail-based recreation SRMA would require a good trail system, which doesn't exist right now. Building such a system could mean impacts on biological resources, he said, so a SRMA could mean tradeoffs between recreation and biological resources. **Steele** said the only certainty is that more people will be recreating in D-E NCA over time. The choices are to maintain the status quo, plan for growth or keep people out. She recommended planning for growth, she said. **Minnick** said a well-designed trail would protect resources. She praised the adaptive management of Ruby/Horsethief, where the BLM designated camp sites and prosed a reservation system –to protect resources and reduce conflict. **Minnick** wants triggers in the D-E NCA management plan, which will produce defined actions when certain growth thresholds are crossed.

Windsor noted that outside a NCA, SRMA management protects recreation from other users. He added that there's no mineral development in the NCA, so the only other use is livestock grazing and a few rights-of-way. What is the nature of the SRMA recreation, he asked – will the quality of experience be a trigger for action that tells BLM it has to do something? **Kimber** asked how BLM determines who to listen to, noting that some people like loud parties on the riverbank. **Stevens** answered that BLM considers public comment, what most people are willing and wanting to experience while recreating in the D-E NCA. Conflicts and resource impacts existed *before* NCA planning started. Windsor noted that outcomes-based planning for recreation is a new concept. Rechel asked whether BLM could manage for habitat quality instead. Blom noted that the RMP alternatives will include those approaches, with the Planning for Priority Species and Vegetation (PPSV) habitat-monitoring program.

Bighorn/Domestic Sheep Presentation

Brad **Banulis**, the area terrestrial biologist on bighorn sheep for the Division of Parks and Wildlife, spoke about bighorn sheep in the NCA.

Desert bighorn sheep were released into the Big Dominguez Creek drainage in 1983 (10 sheep from Arizona), 1984 (10 sheep from Arizona), and 1985 (21 sheep from Nevada in two transplants). Additional sheep releases occurred in the Roubideau Creek drainage in 1991 (18 sheep from Arizona)

and 1993 (20 sheep from Nevada). In the late 1990's, the population was estimated to be approximately 250 sheep.

A *Pasteurella* pneumonia outbreak occurred in the bighorn population in 2001-2002. In 2001-2002 very few lambs were observed and the population appeared to decline dramatically. 27 sheep (five lambs/100 ewes) were observed during the 2002 helicopter survey. The population appeared to rebound in 2004 and 2005. In 2005, 100 sheep (69 lambs/100 ewes) were classified during the coordinated helicopter and ground surveys. Currently, the population is estimated at 150 individuals.

Banulis said predation from mountain lions is a factor in bighorn mortality, as is disease, which can be transmitted from livestock. Stress, from a harsh winter or interaction with people and dogs, can activate a dormant disease. Best guess by biologists is that the D-E NCA could support 300-400 bighorn. CDoW issues three ram licenses per year – used to issue as many as six.

Biologists have learned that bighorn have many disease issues, including pinkeye, blue tongue and pneumonia. **Banulis** said a century of experience has taught that bighorn and domestic sheep cannot have contact or intermingle because disease dieoffs are often the result. He noted recent research (Washington State's College of Veterinary Medicine) which showed transmission upon intermingling.

Payette National Forest in Idaho had documented bighorn dieoff after domestic/bighorn sheep contact. Domestic and bighorn sheep advocates agreed on **core principles**: contact increases risk; it is prudent to prevent contact; not all disease outbreaks can be blamed on contact; contact can be due to gregarious behavior between bighorn and domestic sheep; bighorn rams wander widely; many factors influence bighorn herd viability and healthy bighorn can carry diseases.

Banulis said that in a 2009 memorandum of understanding, the wildlife agency and Colorado Woolgrowers agreed that separation of wild and domestic sheep is the best management strategy, but that the division will not recommend closure of existing allotments based solely on the potential for interaction. The agency also agreed to try not to establish new herds in areas with active sheep/goat permits.

Another set of recommendations emerged from the Western Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies (23 state wildlife agencies). The group recommended intensive monitoring of wild sheep in high risk areas and emergency strategies when contact is documented. BLM management is based on premise of minimizing risk of association and providing effective separation. BLM is considering a broad range of strategies, including trailing, placement of water, weed treatment, use of pack animals, Geographic (e.g., physical barriers), spatial (e.g., buffer zones), seasonal separation options and conversion of allotments to other types of livestock.

WAFWA recommends the following management strategies for grazing permittees:

- Use gregarious breeds of sheep
- Use bred sheep or ewe-lamb pairs
- Small bands with marker sheep
- Use of dogs

- Monitor sheep health and turn out only healthy sheep

Stevens said more conversations are needed between the BLM, division biologists and grazing permittees. There are several sheep grazing allotments north of the Gunnison River and two to the south and east of Escalante Creek. Those two allotments have the highest risk for contact with bighorn.

BREAK

Acquafresca indicated that it would be important to find out how the permittees use these allotments. Are they vital, incidental? He wondered if they'd be interested in a grazing allotment trade that would move operations away from bighorn. **Steele** said there should be followup discussions about the issue. **Harris** had a question as to whether the Gunnison River is enough of a barrier.

Focus Groups

To help guide the Council's discussions on wilderness, **Tim Casey**, of the Natural Resources and Land Policy Institute, provided an overview on his work last year with two focus groups – one in Grand Junction and the other in Delta. The Institute has been studying D-E NCA issues for years, since 2007 – before the NCA designation.

Casey asked the two focus groups to consider various questions having to do with the Dominguez Canyon Wilderness Area and how it should be managed. There were 27 participants in Grand Junction and 13 in Delta. The two groups looked differently at the issue of bighorn sheep and how to manage them. Delta participants expressed the idea that wilderness and what's in it should be left alone, while Grand Junction participants responded more supportively of CDoW using intrusive management (darting and helicopters) to help the bighorn. On a question of whether or not an old gate should be removed from the wilderness, Delta said no while Grand Junction said yes. The questions were designed to reveal preferences for management approaches and tradeoffs between wilderness values.

Casey said BLM and the Advisory Council will need to figure out how these differences should inform management. Grand Junction supported unique and supplemental values while Delta said "leave it alone," valuing untrammelled values. Casey suggested that Grand Junction participants may be more suburban and value naturalness -- knowing there is a place without development.

Casey said that rather than cite differences, the focus groups created interesting debates about natural/untrammelled. He said it would have been interesting to have a Denver focus group as contrast. In the west, wilderness can be perceived as increased restrictions, or as an opportunity to be away from crowds.

Next meeting

The next meeting will be Sept. 21 at the Mesa County Courthouse Annex in Grand Junction. **Stevens** will assemble all the recommendations made so far by the Advisory Council, for review and discussion.